# Discussion

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Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 3, Session 1 — 48 minutes

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*Summary: A participant notices the heart missing beside the golden ball. Russell speaks of warm-heartedness grounded in dignity, tells of Charlie Eck and the street retreat, and describes softening in the chest. He then models embodied listening on his sitting practice — a split between deep sitting and time with Linda — and the group pairs to listen.*

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## Golden ball and heart

*[Participant:]* Yesterday, when Rhonda was doing the sitting aid, she talked about the golden ball and the purpose, and she talked about the golden ball and the heart. And I realized when she said that, that it felt like that piece was kind of missing from real embodied life. I've never heard you say golden ball and heart, or talking about the heart brain or any of that. You talk about all of this, but it seems to be that —

*[Russell:]* Yeah, that's interesting. I'm curious. I feel like I do talk about the heart brain, but maybe I didn't. It is a subject that's important. Have I not?

*[Participant:]* Yeah.

*[Russell:]* What I can say — the part of your comment that I find very helpful is this. When I began the embodied life work, I noticed that so many people were wanting to love everything, but didn't want to drop down. And so I chose to emphasize the center, not trying to eliminate the heart, but to bring the center first. In the first three weeks of the program, much more emphasis there, and then towards the latter parts of the program, bring in that the whole point of all this is so that we can become radiant beings.

It's possible that I didn't bring that strongly enough.

What's true is, I want to affirm that for me, the direction of my inner work, my teaching, and — when I get grandiose — the direction of humanity, is toward cultivating a warm-hearted relationship to absolutely everything that is also grounded and centered, that has dignity in it. That it's not, oh, we're going to be warm-hearted and just love everything. It's a maturity.

But the direction is, how does a warm heart, how does love, how does caring manifest in this situation? Does it need more boundary? Does it need a strong no?

Do I have to close my heart to give a strong no? That gets very interesting to me. When do I manifest anger out of fear? And when is my anger more accurate — that I haven't closed my heart to bring a strong energy into a situation?

And when I do need to close my heart, to recognize that. To have a caring relationship to the place that's closing its heart. Because that place is usually hurting, and so it needs my care. And if I'm

not ready to care for the others yet, I might need to care for the place that's not ready to care. And then when that place feels cared for, the next step is usually to bring that caring to the one I'm in conflict with.

So the direction for me is, as Barbara suggested, that sense of loving kindness towards those I've excluded.

The main purpose for me to do the street retreat was realizing that, for me, there was a group of people that I was not perceiving anymore. They had become a collective of people who were somehow other, and somehow either crazy or dangerous, or somehow outside my field of care, except for sending in a few bucks here and there. But there was something closed in me out of fear. And so I wanted to challenge that and work with that, and get more — because I know deeply, whenever I know someone's story, my judgments go away.

## Hurt people who hurt people

*[Russell:]* I told you the story of Charlie Eck. Do you remember Charlie Eck? Didn't I tell that in this group? I didn't tell Charlie, the guy at the drug rehab center.

*[Participant:]* Really?

*[Russell:]* Okay, so if this sounds redundant, interrupt me, okay? Because I don't need to tell it, but it was so poignant for me. This is many, many years ago. Are you remembering it?

Actually, I don't need to tell it. I need to tell it if it hasn't been told, but if you remember it, I don't have a personal need to tell the story again.

*[Participant:]* Thank you.

*[Russell:]* So, this was so important for me. I was twenty, twenty-one years old. I had the only job I've ever had besides teaching, which was working for a year in a drug rehabilitation center in downtown Pennsylvania.

I somehow got — the guy who ran the place hired me in a position that I was completely unqualified for. I graduated in psychology at a young age of twenty. I'd studied three months at the Gestalt Institute of Canada. That was my entire training. And he hires me to lead group therapy and do individual counseling for people who were getting out of prison.

So we'd go to prison, we'd interview people — these mostly drug offenders, also prostitutes and pimps — and we were the halfway house. And he somehow thought that I could determine whether they were ready, and then be their guide for six months or a year.

For me, it was tremendous learning. I was anxious every day. I would go home after group therapy at night and smoke a joint. And I'd look forward to that all day long, while I'm counseling these people in drug rehab. It was a painful time in which I was learning a lot.

Most of you probably don't know about this era in the seventies, when there was a model based in a kind of Synanon model. Synanon was the big drug rehab place that started in the sixties. We would do marathon encounter groups. And marathon encounter groups were, you would stay up twenty-four hours. And the way we did it, which was similar to Synanon, was the staff and the residents would all work on themselves. A kind of sense of equality with each other.

So what you'd do, you'd be in a group, maybe ten to fifteen people, and we would all take time in the hot seat. We would usually have a couple of hours of telling your story and getting questions, telling your story, getting challenged. The point being to get to some kind of catharsis in which you had some kind of breakdown. This was considered helpful. And sometimes it was, and sometimes it wasn't, in my opinion.

I'm sorry. Is this traumatic?

*[Participant:]* Yeah.

*[Russell:]* Is it okay if I — okay.

So, after a couple of months in the program, we got a guy in who I didn't do intake on, named Charlie Eck. And Charlie Eck kind of looked like his name, Eck. He was a really heavyset guy, sweated a lot, and shaved head before that was popular, very pockmarked. Didn't shower very much. So he really had a smell to him.

And he was immediately the target of ridicule of everybody who stayed at the center. We had, I guess, eighteen beds, and ridicule from the staff. He had developed a personality that was just vile. He was really unpleasant to be around.

And we did our first marathon encounter with him, where he was present, and you could hear people kind of snide and making jokes and stuff like that, until he started telling his story.

Now, one of the things that he had been imprisoned for — and you'll be surprised to hear that he was let out so easily — was child abuse. He had abused two kids that were in his apartment building. So he was the lowest of the low in this subculture.

So he starts telling the story, and without going too much into detail, it contracts. I get contracted very early — about how he was locked in a closet as a kid, and he was rented out by his father to his father's friends for drug money.

And by the time he tells his whole story, everybody — residents, staff, everybody — is just in tears. And it was so harrowing to listen to. And we'd heard a lot of difficult stories, but his somehow went further. Maybe it was because of the way we had closed off so much. Whatever.

But by the time he finished, an amazing thing happened, where — you talk about interaffecting, and we are a relationship. All of a sudden, people were treating him differently, and he was acting differently. And I don't know who or what. It was like chicken and egg, chicken and egg, chicken and egg.

He started showering more. No one said you should shower. He started saying things — he started doing little things that were helpful, which he never did. He asked to volunteer in the kitchen, and no one would have let him near food before that, and he became the main cook by the end of the first year. And he took care of everything. And he became beloved.

And it was such a profound, moving lesson about the power of hurt.

The guy who hired me, Richard Sandel, who's dead now, and was an important teacher in those days for me when I was very young — I learned a lot from Richard, a very sensitive soul. What he used to always say is, always remember, it's hurt people who hurt people. It's hurt people who hurt people. And if you can get to the hurt, everyone's heart's open.

And I have had that experience over and over and over again. My judgments, my closing, are always connected to me not perceiving the hurt being in there. And yes, sometimes I need to take care of the hurt being in here, and it's not ready to open. But my observation is, when I take care of that place, and I can be available to — whether it's an inner voice, or a self who has been excluded, who's been exiled — something opens.

That was maybe the most important thing on the street retreat. Having conversations with people who are talking to themselves, and it's so easy to just say they're loony, or they're out there, and realize that also there was someone there who, in my experience, wanted contact. Not everyone, but often.

There was this one guy who was sleeping in the rain on this little ledge. And my friend — well, Skip, some of you know, he was in the ELMP. He was on the street retreat, and he was sitting, and this guy is across from him, just talking, man, having this whole conversation, and just going. Most of the people talking to themselves are talking to God, which is really interesting, and doing battle between God and the devil. Most of the people talking to themselves are in some sort of conversation, which was pretty fascinating.

And so this guy's having his conversation, and at some point he just stops, and he looks at Skip. Hey, how you doing?

Skip says, yeah, doing pretty well.

He says, I'm going to get something to — this guy had bummed some money — I'm going to go get something to eat. Can I share it with you?

Skip says, I've had enough, but thanks so much.

He goes, well, I'll see you later. Can you watch my stuff?

And then he just goes off, talking to himself, and he comes back with a Subway — what are they called? Well, a sandwich from Subway. I forget what they're called. You know what I mean. And he just, hey, you want some of this?

No, that's fine.

He eats it, and goes back into his conversation. But it's like — and then two days later, we're in another place around the corner, and it's the middle of the night, and the guy comes up and says, hey, remember me?

He said, yeah, how you doing?

He goes, getting by, getting by. How you guys doing?

He said, we're doing okay.

He says, well, stay dry.

And it's so different than my concept of a guy on the street talking to himself.

All of this is to say I'm very taken with the direction of humanity being the opening of the heart. This, what I called yesterday, that the sun is the model for the center of our chest. That we can

become radiant towards all. That we don't just radiate to the pretty flowers and not to the weeds, but we radiate toward all.

We need to make distinctions behaviorally, of course. We can't just be naive. But that direction requires, in my experience, a really good ground, a really good center. A dignity in one's spine. The feeling that my voice is valued by me, and by at least somebody else.

And when we can create environments in which people can have the experience of their groundedness, their dignity, their center, and that they are really listened to, that their voice is valued by somebody in some setting, then the possibilities of them having a maturely opened heart is much greater.

So that is clearly the direction. And if I didn't emphasize it for you, I appreciate that.

## Softening in the chest

*[Participant:]* I actually have some more clarity about what my question was, because all of these other things that we do — ground, center, grass, space — all have, it seems, a physical quality, like the golden ball and the tennis court. But when she was saying that there's a golden ball in your heart, I was going, well, I didn't connect anything to that.

*[Russell:]* What I can connect to that is the sense of softness in your chest, and a sense of openness. The spaciousness in the inside of the body, when this area is more spacious. Because the opposite is true. This is an area of armoring, of protecting, of the ribs tightening, of the chest, when we are protected against our feeling life.

And as this can open — again, intelligently, accurately — there's a softening and a spaciousness that tends to grow. So that's the physical aspect of this region.

And the other phenomenon, kind of a preparation for that in a certain way. Although we're working with it all along, it's really everything that we do that prepares us to — I don't like the word, but I don't know the better word.

What comes is to tolerate the sensations, but I mean more than tolerate, in the sense that we can welcome and accept the pain of a loving heart. What you need to go through to open your heart in some situations.

Which is the important part of why there's such emphasis on turning the light toward those niggly places where our judgments live, and our self-condemnation lives, and our internalized oppressive voices.

Such a key part of my work from day one is, how do I bring some care? How do I listen well enough, and bring some care to —

*[Participant:]* Yeah. Two things come up for me. One is, I've been struggling with the word tolerate.

*[Russell:]* Yeah.

*[Participant:]* And what has come to me is just the capacity to be.

*[Russell:]* Yeah.

*[Participant:]* And somehow tolerate, for me, is like I'm working hard.

*[Russell:]* Right, yeah, that's better. To be with is better.

*[Participant:]* I felt that. That's exactly what came to me.

*[Russell:]* Yeah, good.

*[Participant:]* Yeah, that fits for me, in my sitting this morning.

What I noticed with that — the golden ball came in, in the heart, and it gave me something new about finding this space over this space.

*[Russell:]* Yeah, yeah.

*[Participant:]* And it was a little different physically than I've had, and it felt like it was sort of that relationship.

*[Russell:]* Yeah. Nice, nice.

So you can think of it as the moving center carries the feeling center. The moving center carries, and the support comes from below, the openness from above, and the directionality comes from the symbolizing or thinking center.

And when these are all in harmonious relationship with the outer world, those are moments of integration.

That's what our embodied listening — and I'd say the same for focusing. And I like the term embodied listening just because it helps remind us that it's not necessarily systematized. As it overlaps very much with focusing, is that we're grounded in the body. That's like, in the moving center, the feeling of being in your work, in your physical body. That you're awake to your feelings. You're awake to your thoughts, images, gestures, any of the symbols that come. And that you are connecting, in a moment in time, that there's an environment that you're in.

And in my opinion, when any of those are absent, you get a skewed reading on the moment. If any of those are too dominant — now, they don't have to be equal, they keep changing — but if any of them are absent, or any of them are too dominant, the sense of harmonious unfolding will be interrupted. They can be too dominant for a little while. But eventually, in my experience, the forward movement is much more likely to happen when there is an integration of these sources of knowing.

And that integration is what I talk about when I think of wisdom body function. It's the physical body, the feeling, the symbolizing, and the environment around us.

*[Participant:]* Now you've mentioned this before, and I really got a taste of it in my lesson with Linda. How valuable the movement lessons are, just to sense the head, the heart, the golden ball, and the environment together in movement, without one dominating or one being absent. The genius of just what this can do for integrating that information.

*[Russell:]* Yeah, yeah. I'm with you. I'm with you. It's such a gift. Such a rarely appreciated part. Now that is integrating.

So, can I go? This is a good beginning.

*[Participant:]* Okay. Yes. Yes, it was, and it's available now? Or —

*[Russell:]* Oh, the street retreat recording. I can't remember.

*[Participant:]* Yeah.

*[Russell:]* Yeah, okay. There is some new information about how to access things. It's on the board.

*[Participant:]* Great.

## Embodied listening

*[Russell:]* Okay, so what I'd like to do is take some time with some embodied listening together, briefly, around a particular subject. What wants to be known right now about our meditation practice.

And you'll have a listener, and I want to emphasize that what I so appreciate about this way of listening is to enter it not knowing. Enter it not even trying to get a solution, or a particular outcome, but really trust how to be with yourself, how to be with these different centers, in a curious, open-hearted way, and let your inner life surprise you.

It might start with something you've already thought about, but for me, it's most interesting when something new arises. And for me, it's almost always the case that something unexpected arises if I give my inner life the chance to be listened to.

And so often we might begin like that, but then we want to direct it. And so that process of really trusting the not knowing, trusting the listening.

And just to let you know, one of the reasons I want to do this to start today is, first, I'd like to see what's up in your sitting. See if anything wants to come up and get some guidance from me. Which, by the way, is a really great subject to use in our private meetings. If you come to the private meetings with something that you're wanting to explore — if nothing else, if it's interesting to you, if your sitting practice is important, that's a great thing to ask about. But maybe reflect beforehand as to what might be most helpful for this conversation, in which I can be an ally to your inner process.

I also want to reacquaint us — I know many of you are practicing regularly the kinds of listening that we do — but just to get some practice together, because then this afternoon we'll be doing a longer process. So this morning it'll be about fifteen minutes each, with a partner listening.

And I want to do it first, just because I like to model it, and also I like to have the opportunity to see what wants to come. So I don't do this beforehand, so that I can do it fresh here.

I'd like somebody who's willing to be my partner. Who's that? Good, thank you.

And what I'd like, Felicity, is — I generally don't like too many comments back. I'd like if you'd just kind of hold space for me, and when something is said that feels more a sensing or feeling word, or sentence, or there's a moment that feels more poignant or potent, maybe offer that back. Okay?

And I'll feel free to say no, no, no, or yes, yes, so you can't make a mistake. If you say it and I don't want it, I'll say so. If I'm wanting more, I'll let you know. So, feel free. Okay?

*[Participant:]* Okay.

*[Russell:]* And would you be willing to guide me in? Does that feel okay?

*[Participant:]* Yeah, yeah.

*[Russell:]* Come over here. I'll come back.

Yeah, and what I'd like is, from beginning to end, have it be fifteen minutes. And you all can sit where you are, or come on over, whatever you want.

So, the subject I'm going to be looking at is anything that — okay, so this is 10:07, so it'll be 10:22 when we're done. I want to find out about anything that wants to be known about my meditation practice right now. Yeah, just what wants to be known. What I can learn.

*[Participant:]* So, the question that you want to ask your body is, what can it reveal to you about your meditation practice?

Maybe take a deep breath. Slide with it right into your body, and tell us where you're going.

*[Russell:]* Just give me a couple of reminders of sensing ground. Just a couple.

*[Participant:]* As you're breathing, just notice your sit bones, how they're anchored, and your breath, and how it travels down your spine and through your stomach.

Just inviting your inner life. Anything about sitting practice that would like to be now seen.

## What wants to be known

*[Russell:]* So first what comes is the gratitude for that space, that precious place. It opens. Who's saying that? Soft.

*[Participant:]* And you're motioning through your heart, through the middle section of your body.

*[Russell:]* No matter what. What's coming first are images. Images of sitting upstairs in my room.

There's something — it's interesting. Something that feels whole and complete. Whole and complete in my morning practice. And there's some wondering about later in the day.

Sometimes I have an afternoon-to-evening practice, sometimes not. And I notice there's a wondering, and it comes with a little bit of tightening here. Not curiosity. Just going here, as I'm asking the question now. What about this later in the day?

Something feels kind of a little tightening, and the word confusing, and something feels right about it. Not sure what yet, but I get a clear something that tightens. Something confusing.

The images come of Linda, and there's something in conflict about my cushion and Linda. And that's interesting, because that feels like it hasn't been here in so many years. So let me see.

Something's right about it. I get a lot of yes, somehow. Something is kind of moving forward. It's a little scared, but it's wanting more about this.

I get this picture of, well, if I go up and I sit for a short sitting, that's fine. It's like I come down and we're together. But if I sit more deeply — is that true?

I'm having the picture that I'm not available for connecting.

Yeah, yeah, this is — I see that there's a part of me that doesn't want to look at this. Just going to say hello to the place. It's a little bit scared.

It's like there's this picture of a split. And there's the deep-sitting Russell, entering emptiness, being in the vast absolute space, but not wanting to just sit down and talk. And then there's Russell who just loves being, hey, what'd you do today? What's happening? Let's watch a show. Let's just kind of hang out.

And wow. I mean, even as I gesture, this feels like this big open world over here, and this feels like this warm, kind of gushy world over here. But they feel really split right now.

And something doesn't like that.

I hear kind of a judgment that says it shouldn't be split.

*[Participant:]* Can you breathe into that? Out of curiosity.

*[Russell:]* At the moment I can just kind of sit back and observe the different worlds, almost like I'm on a precipice looking out at these different universes. It seems really distinct.

And I'm curious right now why it's so different in the morning, because it's not like that. And one of the things is, I have more time. I'm up so much earlier, and there's a real — I can take a half hour after my sitting and then be available for contact.

Would that make a difference at night? I'm just kind of trying that on right now. Is that the most important difference?

Oh, something feels both tight and opening at the same time. Tight down here, opening here. There's something important. Time. That I feel rushed at night to get back. Make time.

Oh, yeah. There's something in there that feels like I'm kind of stealing time away from us, and I've got to kind of jump back into the us when it's not ready.

And so it's easier if I just don't sit, or if I sit for fifteen or twenty minutes, or if I play shakuhachi, or do something different that's less far. Which wants to be acknowledged, that that's a good choice sometimes. That's a good choice.

And yeah, I want to just take a moment. That's a good choice sometimes.

But there's this other place that wants to have both possible.

That's interesting. I notice that there's a solution arising, and I'm a little bit noticing a kind of hesitancy, but something also — no, something feels right. It's saying, well, just start early. So you don't wait till six o'clock, and then you're finished late. Start at five o'clock, not four o'clock.

Is that — there's something that gets easier about that.

How much time do I have?

*[Participant:]* You have three minutes.

*[Russell:]* Oh, good. Okay, I need maybe an extra two. I need just a minute to feel.

This all feels right, but there's something inside that's got a little bit of, is that really it? Is it that easy? There's something about that that feels too easy.

And so I'm noticing just a place that really wants me to check in further.

Okay. So this needs to be acknowledged.

Oh, boy. There's an inner story that, up till a certain time, it's my time. And it sounds crazy in words, but I don't want to give up my time for my meditation. I want to start after.

So there's this place that is really seeing that there's a sacrifice that I need to make, and I've been wanting Linda to make the sacrifice. But it's actually my sacrifice if I want that, and I want that.

And boy, it's kind of daunting that I have not seen that. It's my sacrifice that's called for. And that's really true, and a little sad, and really right. My sacrifice is called for.

Yeah. It's a little embarrassing too.

It's really true.

So it's a little bit tender in there, but good, good tender.

I think that's enough, and I just need another minute just to connect with this soft, tender, a little bit embarrassed place.

I'm starting to feel that it's all settling inside. I'm so grateful for the way my inner life finds its reordering. Give it just those extra seconds.

Thank you so much.

## Into pairs

*[Russell:]* Can you find a partner, and find out if there's something that wants to be known in your inner world about your meditation?

Okay, so have a clock. Fifteen minutes. I don't want to take any questions now. Okay, so fifteen minutes each. Ask for what you want, in terms of whether you like a lot of comments, or no comments, or —